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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA: POLITICAL CONGRESSES THIS WEEKEND

¶1. The President's Day holiday, July 18 through 21, are days set aside by Botswana's political parties for their annual congresses. It is at these congresses that parties review their policies and

elect the executive committees that run the parties. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) elects its executive committee every two years while the Botswana Congress Party (BCP) and the Botswana National Front (BNF) do so every three years. The opposition BCP and BNF have avoided holding their leadership elections in the same year as the Botswana's general elections. One reason for this is that the executive committee elections normally leave a rift in the parties. So at this year's congresses the BCP and the BNF will only concentrate on election strategy for the upcoming general elections and review their policies. The ruling BDP, however, will also be electing its executive committee. Some party members within the BDP had tried without success to postpone the executive committee elections until next year, as they fear that the BDP will be greatly weakened by infighting going into the general elections in October.

¶2. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) goes to its congress in Kanye a divided party. There are two main factions: the Jacob Nkate/Mompoti Merafhe faction and the Daniel Kwelagobe faction. Each faction has drawn up a list of nominees for party leadership positions. The Nkate/Merafhe faction is supporting the nomination of Tebelelo Seretse, former chairperson of the BDP women's wing, as the BDP chairperson. Seretse also enjoys the support of President Khama. Daniel Kwelagobe, the BDP chairman is fighting to retain his position and he of course has significant support within the BDP, although President Khama is clearly not supporting him in this race.

President Khama has gone on record to say that he does not have a good working relationship with Kwelagobe. It remains to be seen what Khama will do if Kwelagobe wins the chairmanship. Jacob Nkate, the current BDP Secretary General, has hinted the Khama could resign from the Presidency if Kwelagobe's faction wins control of the BDP executive committee. However, Khama's resignation is not likely, and the President himself has said publicly that he would work with Kwelagobe.

¶3. COMMENT: All BDP leadership positions will be hotly contested at this weekend's BDP Congress, and as a result the BDP may end up a weaker and more divided party. The question to watch as the general election approaches is how weak the ruling party has become. It is still extremely unlikely that the BDP could lose the general election, as the opposition parties are still very fractured, but the BDP may win fewer constituencies than in the past, which would have interesting consequences as the new Parliament is elected and for the opposition parties in the future. END COMMENT.

Nolan